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Toilets

It may be something we avoid in polite conversation, but even on a campsite you'll need somewhere to 'go'. The subject of toilets is enough to put some people off camping altogether – but

it needn't be.

Even the smallest Certificated Site will often boast a flushing toilet these days, but even if you choose to camp far from a 'proper' loo, the days of strong-smelling, noxious chemical toilets and messy emptying are long gone.

Types of chemical toilet

To have waste secured in a holding tank, the Thetford's Porta Potti range is the answer! The Porta Potti comes in two parts. The upper section is a combined flush-water tank and toilet bowl with a detachable seat and cover. The lower section is the waste holding tank. The two sections come apart easily, allowing you to empty the waste conveniently and hygienically.

Many caravans and motorhomes come with built-in toilets in their washrooms. These toilets are generally made by one of two manufacturers, Thetford or Dometic. They have a cassette waste holding tank and some larger tanks are supplied with their own wheels for ease of transportation.

You can normally remove the cassette from the outside of the caravan or motorhome, where it's stored behind a locked panel.

Inside the washroom, the toilet may have a swivel bowl to make the most of a tight space, and the flush may be electrically powered from the unit's leisure battery or using the site's electric hook-up.

As with many things in the camping and caravanning world, toilets and their holding tanks come in all shapes and sizes - from the most basic bucket-with-seat to a top-of-the-range cassette unit with electric flush and a ceramic bowl. Your choice will be influenced by many things including your transport to site, the volume of waste you are likely to collect and – at the top end – your access to a suitable electricity supply to flush your toilet.

Whichever toilet you choose, take time to read the instruction manual and make sure you understand how to use it effectively. This could make the difference between a pleasant holiday and a rather smellier one.

Just to give you an idea of the tank volume you may need: if a couple solely used a chemical toilet (never venturing to the campsite facilities) they'd probably fill a 20-litre tank in three days.

Chemicals to use

Choose your toilet chemical carefully – they work in different ways. Some kill bacteria, others use a biological action to break down waste material and most mask any smell with perfume. Many combine a bit of each. Many sites, including a number of Club sites may request you use only environmentally-friendly chemicals.

The main toilet chemical goes in the unit's waste tank. These chemicals come in a variety of forms. The traditional type is a fluid, which needs water to dilute it. It's normally more expensive to buy chemicals in tablet form – or even 'liquid tablets' like the cleaning products you can buy for your washing machine – but you may decide the convenience outweighs the extra cost.

If you use a flushing toilet – as often installed in the washrooms of caravans or motorhomes – you may also want to add a chemical to the water in the flush-water tank. This is sometimes referred to as the 'pink' chemical, after the colour of the early flush-water tank fluids.

Most toilet fluids tend to lose their effectiveness after about three days so it is best to either empty your loo or top up with fresh fluid regularly.

Go Outdoors offers a good range of chemical toilet fluids and with its discount card and Club membership you can save money on these products as well.

No extra additives, please

It probably goes without saying you should only put human waste down your toilet. Disposable nappies or any other similar items should never enter the system.

Toilet chemical suppliers generally recommend using 'quick dissolve' toilet paper with your unit. If your family uses a significant amount of paper this might be a good idea, but in most cases standard toilet paper will be fine and it will almost certainly be cheaper.

Emptying your chemical toilet

The first rule of chemical toilets is that you must only empty them in a specifically designated place. Apart from the obvious hygiene issues, the chemicals should not go straight into the sewerage system.

On a campsite this will probably be marked as a Chemical Disposal Point or CDP. On some sites, it might appear as an Elsan Point. If you can't find an official emptying point, your only option will be to flush the contents of your toilet down a normal WC, which may mean taking it back home.

Under no circumstances should you empty black waste (as the contents of a toilet are sometimes called) at a standard grey water (often called a 'waste water') disposal point. And always keep it well away from any fresh water point.

Unless you are using the most basic 'bucket and chuck it'-style unit, the waste will be stored in a sealed cassette. The key to emptying this without spluttering is to press the air-valve button, allowing air to flow into the cassette while the waste flows smoothly out. Your unit's instruction manual will show you how to locate this button.

Pans of the past

Elsan first introduced the chemical toilet to the world in the 1920s and for some 'Elsan' has become the generic term for both toilet fluid and chemical toilets. An Elsan was even the 'convenience of choice' for air raid shelters and bomber crews during the Second World War.

Today you will often see campsites refer to their Chemical Disposal Points as Elsan Disposal Points because of the history and popularity of the brand.

A floral end

And finally, here's a 'delicate' tip - please don't read on if you're of a sensitive disposition.

When using your chemical toilet for solid waste disposal, you can help keep the bowl clean by lining it with three pieces of toilet paper, as shown, before use.

When the toilet is flushed, the paper disappears into the cassette below with the six leaf-like petals of a flower closing around the deposit.

To find out more...

You will find a selection of chemical toilets and fluids at your local camping retailer. There's also plenty of information online from companies such as:

Blue Diamond
Dometic
Elsan
Thetford

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